



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS OF EARLY DECATUR, ABRAHAM LINCOLN RICHARD J. OGLESBY AND THE CIVIL WAR.

By JANE MARTIN JOHNS, PUBLISHED BY DECATUR CHAPTER, DAUGHTERS
OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION, 1912.

REVIEWED BY ISABEL JAMISON.

Coming from Circleville, Ohio, in 1849, by river, canal and a hoop-top wagon, Mrs. Johns has watched, from her home on Johns' Hill, the gradual growth of Decatur from a village of 400 inhabitants to a thriving and beautiful city. Brought into social contact with many of the political giants of those stirring days before and during the Civil War, when Illinois was making history of a quantity and quality that she has never since equalled, Mrs. Johns is eminently fitted to chronicle the story of an epoch, whose stars grow brighter as the twilight of passing years gathers about it. The narrative is of Macon County in general, and of Decatur, in particular, and is rich in that "personal touch" which is such a marked characteristic of Mrs. Kinzie's "Wau-bun," and which arrests the attention and holds the interest of even the casual reader, linking together the dry bones of historical facts and making of history an absorbing romance.

The first division of the book outlines briefly the early days of Decatur, the advent of the railroads, the subsequent growth of manufactures, and commerce; the religious convulsions that rocked the primitive community; the development of the public school system, and interesting reminiscences of some of the gay doings of early society, with a peep at the toilets worn by the participants therein.

The second part of the volume is devoted to Abraham Lincoln, with whom the authoress became acquainted when he was about forty years of age. A "Bit of Unwritten History" is given in this chapter, being the story of Lincoln's failure to be elected to the United States Senate in 1855, and the causes which led to the election of Lyman Trumbull, a little drama in which Mrs. Johns played a leading part.

Mrs. Johns claims Decatur as the birthplace of the Republican party, an honor which Bloomington has held for many years. She states

that the political infant was born and christened at a convention of Anti-Nebraska editors, which was held at Decatur, February 22, 1856, and of which Paul Selby, then editor of the Jacksonville Journal, was Chairman. Mr. Selby is probably the only delegate to this convention who is still living.

Another incident related in this Chapter, is the endorsement of Mr. Lincoln as a presidential candidate by the Republican convention held at Decatur May 6, 1860. An exciting journey made by Mrs. Johns to New Orleans by boat in January, 1861, at the time Louisiana seceded from the Union, and the return trip carrying the gold for which the cargo had been sold, is another story that thrills the reader.

It is in the division relative to Abraham Lincoln that the writer introduces an extract from the Illinois State Register of August 4, 1864:

"Today is 'Massa Linkum's day of fasting, humiliation and prayer.' As the REGISTER thinks, the nation has ample reason for fasting, because Lincoln has made food so high; for humiliation at the disgrace his miserable, imbecile policies have brought upon us, and for prayer that God, in His goodness, will spare us a second term of such a president." Mrs. Johns remarks in passing that such vile attacks of the press in his old home that he loved so well, must have been bitterest of all to Mr. Lincoln.

This might well be the case, but the fact should not be overlooked that this attack was made by the organ of the opposition party, and that Mr. Lincoln had been too long engaged in the rough and tumble game of politics, now and then participating, himself, in a little oratorical mud-slinging through the columns of his party organ, to be seriously affected by an attack upon him by the opposition press, even in his old home; the half-hearted support and apologetic attitude of his friends, was probably much harder to bear.

The third part of Mrs. Johns' "Recollections," deals with Richard J. Oglesby, whom she says, Decatur claims as "her most distinguished and best-beloved citizen," since he spent in that town most of his youth, and some of his maturer years.

"Six times, when I was a boy, I tried to get away from Decatur, and six times I was forced by fate to return," he stated; the attempted escape being due to the fact there seemed to be no opening in Decatur for a poor boy of soaring ambitions except manual labor, to which he was not irresistibly drawn, although he was forced by necessity to do his share of it early in life. It was the case of the round peg and the square hole, or vice versa, and when at last he found in politics, the niche into which he fitted, there was almost no pause in the onward march of his success until increasing years and the bullet he had brought

in his breast from the battle-field of Corinth, led to his retirement from active life. Four other Decatur war-heroes are also given mention in this part of the work.

The fourth division of the book contains a very complete account of the work performed by the Decatur Soldiers' Aid Society, and of the Sanitary Fair, together with many reminiscences of the Civil War. It tells of the part taken in the struggle by the women of Macon County, and of the North, generally, who stayed at home to weep, but found little time to do it, so varied and strenuous were the duties and opportunities that came knocking at their doors. It is interesting to note in this connection, that Mrs. Johns dates the emancipation, not only of the negro, but of the women, from this time. Of necessity, the man of the family relinquished his traditional grip upon the family purse when he went marching away to the strains of "The Girl I Left Behind Me." This hypothesis opens an interesting question as to whether or no there would have been fewer volunteers and more drafts had he realized then that the girl he left behind him would so speedily develop an amount of self-reliance and capability that would carry the sex into almost every avenue of business activity in the days to come, even to a raid upon the sacred masculine prerogative of the ballot!

Judging from the tenacity of the masculine grip upon the ballot-box in our own fair Illinois today, it is very probable that, after the "floating male population" had been absorbed in the first call for volunteers, those "prominent, influential and prosperous citizens" who filled the later organized regiments, instead of dropping their duties and avocations and marching to the front singing, "We're Coming, Father Abraham, With 100,000 More," would have said kindly but firmly, "Oh, no, Father Abraham, 'I have married me a wife' and therefore I must stay at home to keep her in order." It is a great pity that we are not now so much addicted to debating societies as we were in the days when they formed a large part of our entertainment after "early candle lighting," as this question might form an interesting subject for discussion.

Mrs. Johns' book closes with brief accounts of the work done by other Aid Societies in the State which responded to her request for information, these responses, unfortunately, few in number.

There are also a few sketches of life in Decatur in the early days, contributed by pioneers. Altogether the book is a very interesting one, and will well repay perusal. It would be a fortunate thing for every county in the State if it could produce so able and willing a historian as Macon County has done, to rescue the tale of its early struggles from the oblivion that is so fast closing about the unwritten past of the State.